



# Economic Contributions of the Amistad National Recreation Area to the Regional Economy of Del Rio, Texas

March 2005

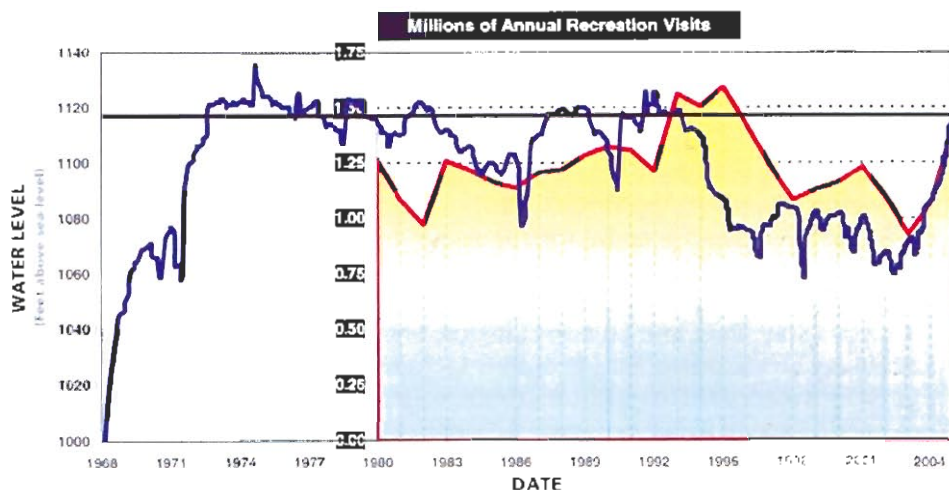


## SUMMARY

The Amistad National Recreation Area (NRA) is an important element of the regional economy of the city of Del Rio and Val Verde county. This report draws upon material prepared in 2004 for the General Management Plan update to highlight the substantial economic benefits that accrue to the region from Amistad NRA.

- In 2004, Amistad NRA recorded 1,445,772 recreation visits, the highest since 1995, fourth highest on record and 47th highest in terms of annual visitation among the 388 areas managed by the National Park Service.<sup>1</sup>
- Recreation use at Amistad NRA in 2004 was 35 percent higher than in 2003, ranking Amistad NRA 14th among all National Park Service units in terms of the year-over-year increase compared to 2003.
- Operation of Amistad NRA itself, including personnel compensation and local purchases in 2003, account for 53 jobs and \$3.5 million in annual economic activity. Of the latter, \$2.4 million is personal income.
- The spending by almost 1.1 million annual visitors in 2003 supported another 468 jobs and \$29.37 million in economic activity, \$7.9 million of which is personal income.
- Fluctuations in Lake Amistad pool elevations affect annual visitation to Amistad NRA. Between 1979 and 2004, annual recreation visits ranged between 976,414 (1980) and 1,591,903 (1994). Annual recreation use over the 25-year period averaged about 1,236,000 -see Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Recreation Visits to Amistad National Recreation Area 1979 - 2004 as compared to Lake Amistad Reservoir Levels**



Source: International Boundary and Water Commission and Amistad NRA visitation counts.

<sup>1</sup> Annual visitation for 2004 was available for 355 of the units at the time this report was prepared.

- During an extended drought that dropped lake levels to a near record low of 1,060 feet above MSL, annual recreation use dropped below 1,000,000 in 2002, for the first time since 1981.
  - Since 2002, Lake Amistad has risen more than 50 feet to 1,114 feet in January 2005.
  - May 2004 saw a return of personal watercraft use on Lake Amistad.
  - In 2003, visitors to Amistad NRA spent an estimated \$23.95 million in Del Rio and surrounding region.
  - Del Rio, the county seat of Val Verde county, is the primary gateway community for Amistad NRA. With a population of 35,156 (2003), Del Rio is home to just over 75 percent of all Val Verde County residents.
  - The resident population totals do not reflect seasonal and part-time residents of 663 second and weekend homes enumerated in the 2000 Census. One could reasonably expect 1,500 to 2,500 additional people in the area in conjunction with these homes during peak use periods, such as Memorial Day weekend.
  - The resident population estimates do not reflect seasonal and part-time residents of the many second and weekend homes in the area. One could reasonably expect 1,500 to 2,500 additional people in the area in conjunction with these homes during holidays and other peak use periods, such as Memorial Day weekend.
  - Residential subdivisions have developed adjacent to the NRA near its Spur 454, Black Brush Point and Diablo East boat ramps and visitor use areas and near Rough Canyon and Box Canyon.
  - Seventy percent of the visitors to Amistad NRA are from out of the area, bringing "new" money into the local economy. Twelve percent of the visitors spend the night in local motels, campgrounds and RV parks.
  - Amistad NRA draws many visitors come from the San Antonio area, population 1.1 million in 2000, about 150 miles east of Del Rio.
  - Lodging and visitor services are an important part of the local economy. Lodging receipts in Val Verde County average about \$8.7 million annually. Visitors to Amistad account for about one-third of the total.
  - The synergy of Amistad and other attractions, including the Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site, the Shumla School, and The Nature Conservancy's Dolan Falls Preserve, increases the cumulative appeal of the area for visitors and contributes to the success of each.
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# ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATION AREA TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY

More than a decade after its establishment, Amistad NRA, its staff, their households, seasonal residents of the area and visitors to the NRA are integral parts of the region's economic and social structure. Key dimensions of Amistad NRA's role in the affected environment are described below.

## Economic Contributions of Amistad NRA Operations

- Staffing at Amistad NRA has risen to 37 full-time employees to respond to administrative and management needs associated with accommodating over 1.0 million recreation visits per year, three major concession operations, and an extensive inventory of visitor facilities, trails and other improvements. Construction contractors, seasonal campground hosts and other volunteers supplement Amistad NRA's permanent staff.
- Amistad NRA's budget for fiscal year 2003 was \$2.56 million. The largest share of Amistad NRA's operating budget, \$2.05 million, is for salaries, wages and fringe benefits paid to park personnel.
- The remaining budget was for utilities, office supplies, vehicle maintenance, travel, other operating costs and the expenses associated with visitor center renovation. Much of the annual expenditures circulate through the regional economy in the form of consumer and business purchases, yielding indirect and induced economic impacts.
- The indirect and induced impacts support 16 additional jobs, generate over \$375,000 in labor income and over \$1.08 million in additional economic output in the local economy. Table 1 summarizes the combined direct and secondary impacts attributable to Amistad operations.

**Table 1. Economic Impacts of Amistad National Recreation Operations, 2003**

<b>Jobs</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Annual Personal Income</b>	<b>\$2,424,900</b>
<b>Economic Output</b>	<b>\$3,517,000</b>

- In addition to the economic contributions from operations, which are recurrent, construction activities at Amistad NRA generate additional one-time job, income and business volume impacts. The magnitudes of such impacts are functions of the dollar value and type of project and the extent to which private contractors are used.

## Economic Contributions of Recreation Use at Amistad NRA

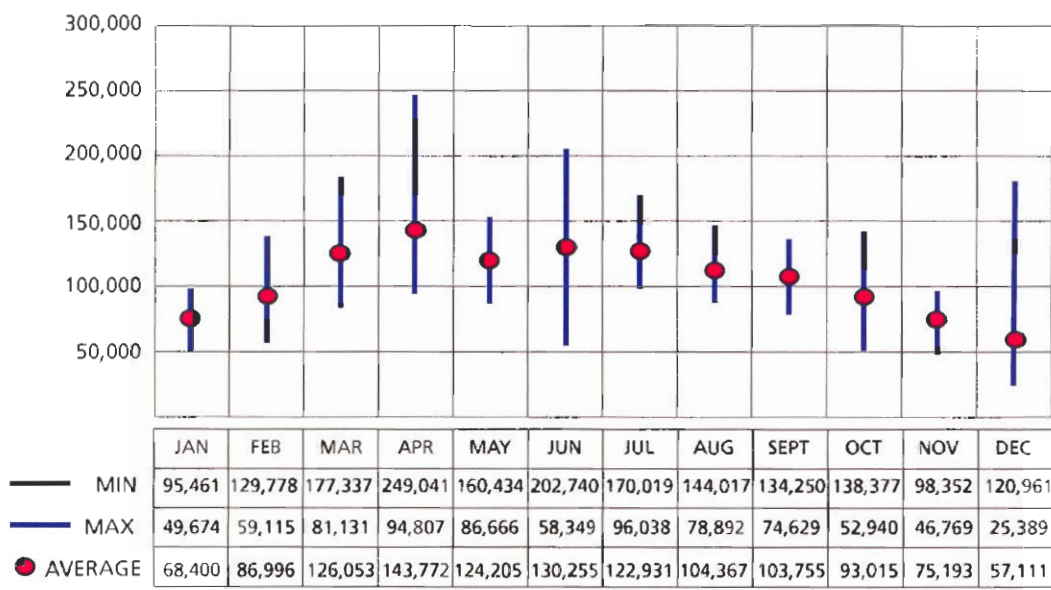
Substantial as they are, the economic contributions attributable to direct NPS operations at Amistad NRA are only a portion of its overall economic contribution. The



impacts attributable to visitors are, in aggregate, much greater than that of the NRA operations.

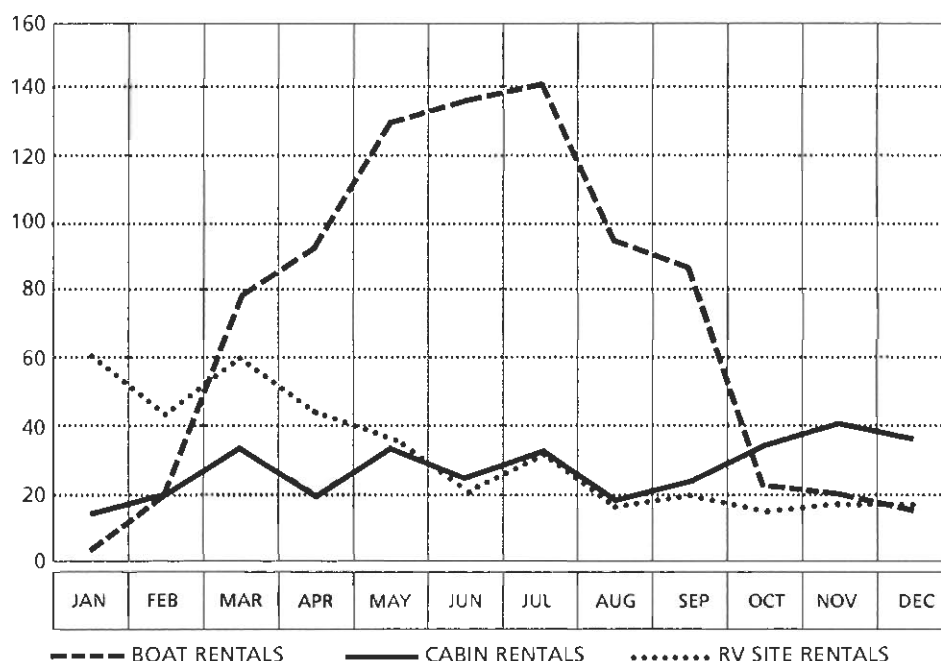
- Boating and boat fishing are the predominant recreation activities at Amistad NRA. In 2002, there were 1,085 registered boats in Val Verde County, a ratio of 23.6 boats per 1,000 residents, even though Amistad provides the only major boating opportunity in the region.
- Amistad NRA has gained recognition as one of the prime black bass fishing lakes in Texas, which draws many local, regional and statewide fishing tournaments to the facility.
- Other popular activities include birding, camping, hunting, picnicking, water-skiing, scuba diving (when water conditions permit), and cultural/history study.
- Over the years, visitation has fluctuated in response to rising and falling pool elevations and the attendant adverse effects on recreation access. Lower pool levels necessitate closing some boat ramps; restrict boat access to several popular areas due to shallow waters; and, limits shore access at other day use areas.
- Most recreation use at Amistad NRA is day-use. Overnight use between 1979 and 2004 averaged about 59,500 tent, RV and backcountry campers annually. Overnight use was much higher in the early years of Amistad's operations, but has declined over time in response to drought conditions and lower pool elevations, averaging just 18,300 overnight stays annually in the past five years.
- Late spring/early summer is the peak recreation season at Amistad. Peak visitation occurs in April, followed by June. The lowest recreation use tends to occur in December. Figure 2 summarizes the monthly visitation patterns from 1979 to 2004.

**Figure 2. Monthly Visitation At Amistad National Recreation Area  
Maximum, Minimum & Mean, 1979 to 2004**



- Like other southern tier areas in the nation offering warmer climates and outdoor recreation amenities, seasonal visitation patterns at Amistad reflect some "snowbird" migration. This trend is evident at the Air Force's Southwinds RV, cabin and campground and marina concession where the highest utilization of RV campsites occurs between February and April. As shown in Figure 3, the number of RV site rentals, many of which are for extended periods, are highest during the winter and spring, tapering off during the heat of the summer. Boat rentals, on the other hand, peak during the summer, with little activity during the winter.
- Non-local visitors staying overnight in area hotels, motels and RV campgrounds and those who rent houseboats, generate the largest economic contributions.

**Figure 3. Monthly Recreation Activity, Laughlin Air Force Base Recreation Area, FY 2002 - 2003**



- Local residents accounted for 30 percent of all recreation visits to Amistad NRA. Non-local day use visitors accounted for 58 percent of all recreation visits. Overnight visitors staying at one of the group campgrounds, on houseboats, or in local area accommodations accounted for 12 percent of recreation visitors.
- Recreation visitors to Amistad NRA spend an average of \$49 per party per day, with a range between \$33 for non-local day users and \$213 for non-local fishing tournament participants.
- Local day visitors spend \$55 per party per day.

- Total visitor spending was estimated at \$23.95 million in 2003 - see Table 2.

**Table 2. Visitation and Spending by Visitor Segment, 2003**

	Local Day Visitors	Non-local Day Users	Overnight Visitors				Totals
			Other Visitors	Tournament Fishing	Hunters	Camping	
<b>Recreation Visits</b>	316,569	626,244	92,929	10,907	2,171	22,379	<b>1,071,199</b>
<b>Total Spending (millions)</b>	\$8.20	\$9.00	\$3.79	\$1.48	\$0.17	\$1.31	<b>\$23.95</b>

- Retail trade, including spending on groceries, sporting equipment and souvenirs, captures the largest share of direct visitor spending. The second largest category is spending in restaurant and bars.
- Direct visitor spending for lodging is estimated at \$2.59 million, about 30 percent of that sector's total 2003 receipts of \$8.64 million.
- Direct visitor spending supports about 393 jobs and personal income of \$6.0 million annually. The secondary effects generates \$5.3 million in direct sales, supports 75 additional jobs and another \$1.9 million in personal income.

**Table 3. Economic Impacts of Visitor Spending, By Sector  
Amistad National Recreation Area, 2003**

Sector / Spending Category	Direct Sales (millions)	Jobs	Personal Income (millions)
Motels, B&Bs & houseboats	\$ 2.59	59.8	\$1.0
RV & camping fees	\$ 0.34	7.9	\$0.1
Restaurants & bars	\$ 5.85	175.8	\$2.1
Retail trade	\$ 8.89	118.9	\$2.2
Other	\$ 6.28	30.4	\$0.6
<b>Total Direct Effects</b>	<b>\$23.95</b>	<b>392.8</b>	<b>\$6.0</b>
Secondary Effects	\$ 5.32	75.0	\$1.9
<b>Total Effects</b>	<b>\$29.27</b>	<b>467.9</b>	<b>\$7.9</b>

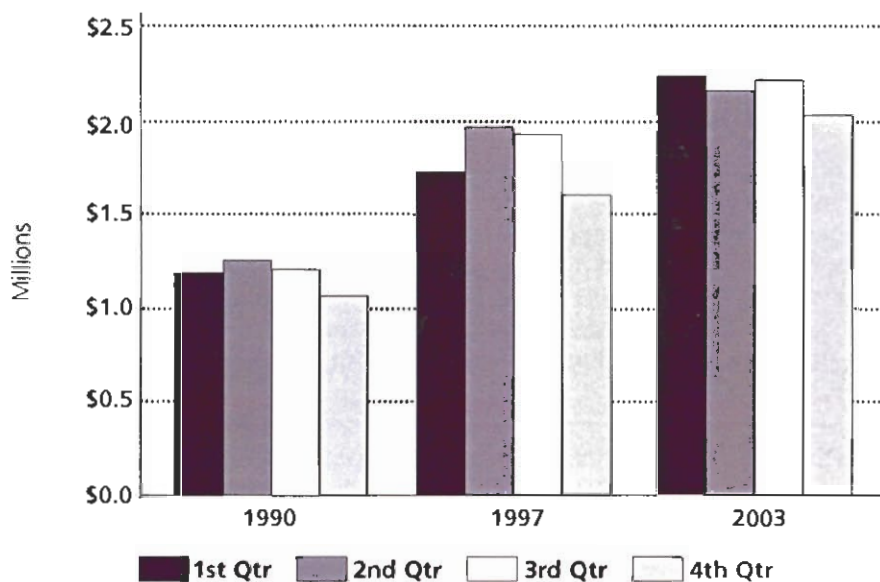
- Combining the economic contributions of the direct park operations and those attributable to visitor spending yields total impacts of 521 jobs and \$10.3 million in personal income per year -see Table 4.

**Table 4. Summary of Economic Contributions from  
Amistad National Recreation Area, 2003**

	Jobs	Personal Income (\$ millions)
NPS Operations	53	\$ 2.40
Visitor Related	468	\$ 7.90
<b>Totals</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>\$10.30</b>

- With Del Rio being the largest community in Texas for nearly 150 miles, local businesses realize most of the benefit from these expenditures.
- Del Rio's retail sector includes over 180 stores and shops and 94 bars, restaurants, motels and campgrounds that cater to residents and visitors, many of the latter drawn by Amistad National Recreation Area.
- In 2003, 1,077 businesses in Val Verde county, recorded \$656.1 million in gross retail sales, of which \$262.0 million was subject to retail sales tax. Nearly 97 percent of the taxable retail sales occurred at establishments in Del Rio.
- Local motels are vital components of the community's hospitality industry. Since 1990, the local bed base has increased by 25 percent, with 20 establishments offering about 1,110 rooms. In addition, there are over 500 trailer, RV and camping spaces.
- Annual lodging receipts in Del Rio and the surrounding area were \$8.64 million in 2003. The estimated average rate per rented room-night was about \$47.
- Annual occupancy for the area's motels averages about 56 percent.
- The estimated average rate per rented room-night is about \$47.
- No single quarter accounts for more than 30 percent of the annual lodging receipts - see Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Quarterly Lodging Receipts, Val Verde County**



Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts and Texas Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism Office.



- The five largest lodging properties account for about 75 percent of all receipts and 50 percent of the available rooms.
  - The City of Del Rio levies a 7.0 percent hotel occupancy tax on overnight room receipts. Proceeds of the tax support Del Rio's convention center, promote tourism, promote the arts, and support historical preservation and restoration activities.
  - Visitors to Amistad NRA generate about 125,000 overnight stays in the Del Rio area, spending an estimated \$2.59 million for lodging; that is equivalent to about 33 percent of the total annual receipts of Del Rio's lodging establishments. Assuming 90 percent of those expenditures occur in Del Rio yields more than \$180,000 in hotel occupancy taxes.
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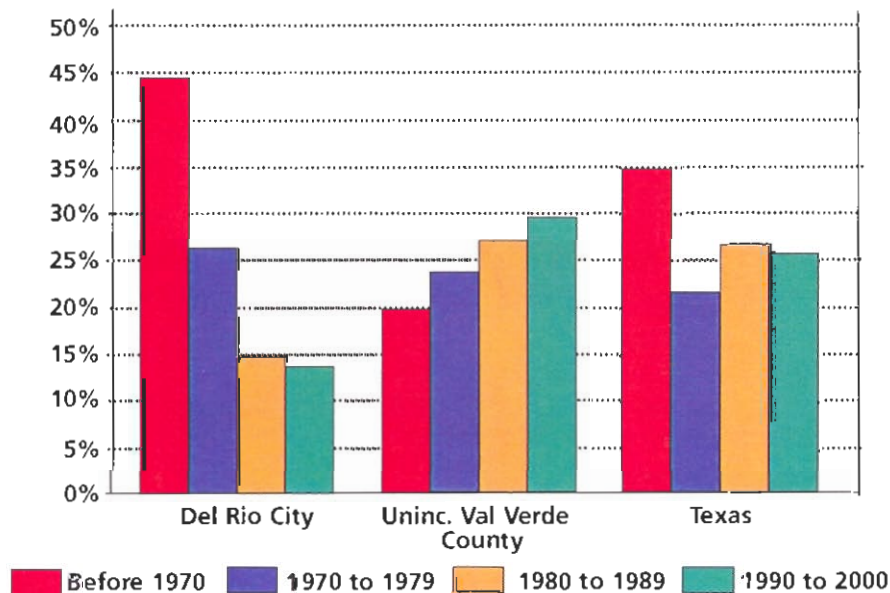
## **OTHER DIMENSIONS OF AMISTAD NATIONAL RECREATIONAL AREA'S ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

The jobs, income and spending impacts of the NPS operations and visitor spending described above are the most obvious examples of the economic contributions of Amistad NRA to the local economy. However, those estimates do not fully capture its importance. Other dimensions of Amistad NRA's economic contributions are not readily quantifiable, but can be described.

- The creation of Lake Amistad stimulated the construction of many vacation homes near Amistad NRA. Fully 80 percent of all housing in unincorporated Val Verde has been built since the dam was completed.
- Val Verde county's housing stock of 16,288 units in 2000 included 663 homes for seasonal or occasional use, many of those near Lake Amistad. Several subdivisions under active development near the Black Brush Point and Spur 454 boat ramps promote access and proximity to Amistad NRA among their selling points.
- Second homeowners and their guests account for substantial recreation use at Amistad NRA. The economic infusion associated with that use is included in the total economic impacts reported above. However, their home ownership, entertainment and other expenditures that are not directly related to their visit to Amistad, and the jobs and taxes generated for local governments are not included. One can reasonably argue that much of the second home development and associated economic benefits would not have occurred but for Amistad NRA.
- The Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site is near the Pecos River recreation area on the Rio Grande arm of Lake Amistad. Although smaller, Seminole Canyon is an important partner for Amistad NRA. Its Visitor Center is staffed during the day, providing an vital communications and back-up first-responder emergency response capability; its 31-space developed campground hosts many visitors who also visit Amistad NRA during their stay, and a number of cooperative interpretation and education programs between the two facilities enhances the overall visitor experience. In fiscal 2003, Seminole Canyon recorded almost 9,000 overnight guests, equivalent to 39 percent of the total overnight camping at Amistad.

- Amistad NRA staff conduct and participate in many educational and cultural events and programs in Del Rio and elsewhere in the region. These events and programs include a cooperative program with AMTRAK, the "Trails to Rails" program and the Archeology Fair conducted in cooperation with the Whitehead Museum and local school district.
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC) operates the 18,500-acre Dolan Falls Preserve. Straddling the Devils River on Amistad's northern border, the preserve is one of the "jewels" in TNC's portfolio of protected properties. The preserve is open to the public for scheduled field trips and volunteer workdays. Although the number of visitors to Dolan Falls is small, the publicity and other synergies, e.g., scientific research, between the facilities boost local tourism and economic benefits to the area.
- Another Amistad NRA partner is the Shumla School. Locally-founded, the Shumla School is a living museum and experiential education center dedicated to the study of human use of materials, land and art. The school is located near Amistad's Pecos River activity area and the Seminole Canyon State Park and Historical Site.

**Figure 5. Age of Housing Stock - Census 2000, Year Structure was Built**

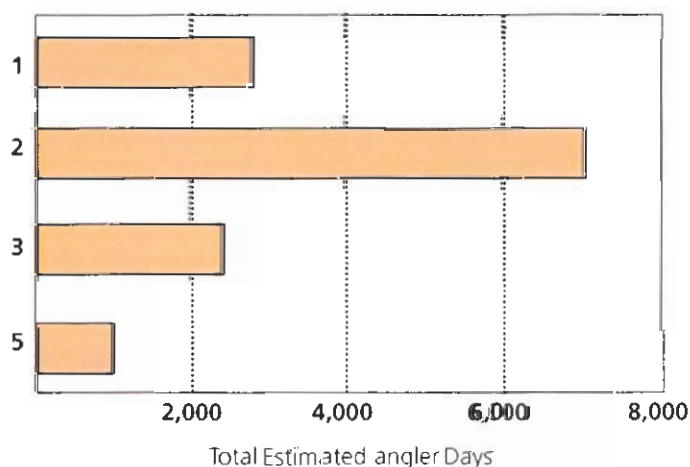


## SPOTLIGHT ON BASS FISHING TOURNAMENTS

Amistad's quality black bass fishery has given rise to an increasing number of fishing tournaments being held at the lake. Tournament sponsors include local fishing clubs, as well as regional, state and national fishing organizations. Tournament participants and friends and family who accompany them generate substantial spending in the local economy for lodging, meals, groceries, fuel, fishing tackle, bait, and other goods and services.

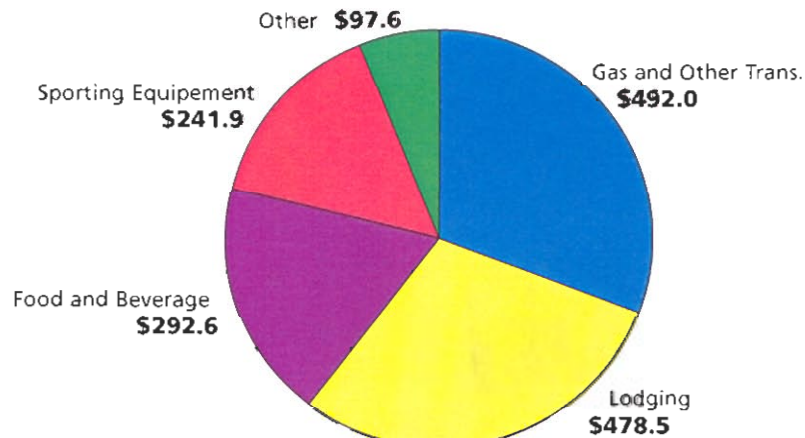
- Amistad NRA issued special use permits for 155 fishing tournaments in 2002.
- Nearly half of the tournaments (75 of 155) were one-day events. The 80 multi-day events included 74 two-day, 5 three-day, and one five-day tournaments.
- Local fishing clubs sponsored 88 of the tournaments.
- Austin and San Antonio areas clubs sponsored 24 tournaments.
- National organizations and those based elsewhere in Texas sponsored 43 tournaments.
- Most tournaments had between 10 and 25 boats. Only 32 had 26 or more boats.
- The 155 tournaments hosted an estimated 8,302 boat-days and 13,283 angler-days of fishing, not including any pre- or post-tournament practice fishing.
- Non-local residents account for 80 percent of all bass fishing tournament participants.
- Over half (53.5%) of the total angler-days associated with fishing tournaments occurred in conjunction with 2-day fishing tournaments - see Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Estimated Annual Angler Days at Amistad National Recreation Area by Duration of Fishing Tournament - 2002**



- One-fourth of all angler-days of fishing occurred in conjunction with the five 3-day and single 5-day tournaments.
- One-day tournaments accounted for nearly half of all the tournaments but 21 percent of the tournament days of fishing.
- Bass fishing tournaments are important economic generators. Data published by Texas A&M University tournaments indicated estimated daily spending of about \$156 per non-resident tournament participant.
- Average daily spending by local fishing tournament participant is estimated to be \$58, or \$93 per team.
- Estimated total direct local spending associated with bass fishing tournaments at Amistad NRA in 2002 was \$1.6 million.
- Transportation at \$492,000 was the single largest category of spending, followed by lodging at \$478,500 - see Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Estimated Local Spending by Bass Fishing Tournament Participants, 2002**



Note: Annual spending in thousands of dollars.

### CONCLUSION

The economic contributions of Amistad National Recreation Area to the regional economy are significant. Those contributions include an estimated 521 jobs, \$10.3 million in annual personal income, and over \$32 million in annual spending. Those contributions benefit the local hospitality industry, retailers, tourism promotion efforts, and local government through the sales and taxes generated. With rising water levels at Lake Amistad triggering recreation use level not seen at Amistad in over a decade, those economic contributions will likely increase as well.